The Sociology of Fancy-Schmancy:
Cultural evaluation under the regime of radical suspicion

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Abstract
Critical sociology suggests that taste judgments are not independent of the social, as actors use them to claim social value. This article demonstrates that this critical perspective has gained currency among laypersons, transforming everyday struggles over cultural evaluation. I discuss the new discursive category 'farterism', which emerged in Israel in the 1990s to denounce vain pretence and became ubiquitous in everyday evaluation. I analysed online user-generated reviews on films and restaurants alongside broadsheet newspaper articles to explore how this category is used in different contexts by different actors, which aesthetic surface-characteristics are most associated with it and why, and how farterism critique reshapes the relationship between lay judgments and established market (prices) and field/art-world (status) hierarchies. Farterism critique is often used to fend-off symbolic violence, but cultural elites use it too, despite their interest. I discuss the implicit ethic behind farterism critique, and its connections with recent transformations of capitalism.

Keywords
authenticity, cultural evaluation, online reviews, pretension, sign value, sociology of critique

A quarter-century ago, a new slang word entered the Hebrew language: faltsanut (literally: 'farterism'). This label is used to denounce tastes, cultural objects (films and art exhibitions; restaurants and hotels; texts and statements), practices and their human carriers for their alleged vain pretence (a meaning related to English expressions such as fancy-schmancy, artsy-fartsy, posh, hot air, and flatulent). Despite referring to abject bodily functions, it quickly became extremely common verbally, even among the highly-educated, and increasingly common in writing (as demonstrated by data from Google Ngram and from the elitist Haaretz newspaper's archive: see Appendices 1-2). Since 2003 it even appears in conservative printed Hebrew dictionaries.

This article analyses the cultural logic of farterism critique, its usage patterns and the sociological meaning of its emergence from the perspective of the cultural sociology of value and evaluation (for a review: Lamont 2012). By looking closely at the ways different actors employ and contest the category of farterism we may gain better understanding of transformations in the social production and negotiation of cultural value; and in the relations between different value judgments—those produced by institutionalized cultural fields (criticism, prizes) and markets (prices) and those produced by individual lay cultural consumers. I show that farterism critique reflects a growing mistrust of various mechanisms that stabilize cultural value and hierarchies and characterize the surface aesthetic that arouses farterism suspicions.

The analysis relies on content analysis of three data-sets—225 restaurant user-reviews from the popular website Rest.co.il, 91 film user-reviews and 149 Haaretz newspaper articles that include the word faltsanut. All quotes below are taken from the data unless stated otherwise. User-reviews allow exploring how laypersons use this category in evaluation vis-à-vis market and field hierarchies. The cinematic and the culinary fields both produce a wide range of products throughout the high/popular spectrum, but represent different levels of institutionalization and autonomy from the market. Furthermore, while films differ dramatically in status, cinema tickets have a fixed price, whereas restaurants differ considerably in the prices they charge. Thus, analysing both film reviews and restaurant reviews allow us to explore how farterism critique is employed to challenge both field and market hierarchies. While farterism critique flourishes in online reviews (and is in line with their typical direct style and stress on subjective experience rather than on cultural authority: Verboord 2014, Hanrahan 2013), it emerged well before web 2.0, and also takes place in more traditional media. The Haaretz dataset brings the voice of culture professionals, academics and other sections of the middle-classes (which are over-represented among
The sociology of cultural value

The sociology of culture is very much the sociology of value judgments and cultural hierarchies. We have multiple conceptualizations of evaluation and valuation mechanisms, including markets, labour investment (in the Marxist tradition), fields (Bourdieu 1984, 1993), art-worlds (Becker 1982), judgment devices (Karpik 2010), and worlds of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006). Standard economy conceptualizes value as price, the interaction of demand and supply in markets. Since demand represents the aggregation of subjective utilities, exchange-value can be roughly traced back to use-value. Pricing a meal at £100 or grossing £100 million thus indicate the value of restaurants and films respectively. While market prices can be performative and endow value rather than merely reflecting pre-existing utilities (Velthuis 2003), they help stabilize value hierarchies.

However, some cultural hierarchies divert from or even reverse those of markets. Bourdieu (1984, 1993) famously suggested that cultural production is organized in relatively autonomous 'fields' of struggle over legitimation, which have field-specific forms of capital or stakes. The most autonomous sub-fields are based on the suspension or reversal of economic value, as cultural hierarchy is based on distinction from common tastes. Value is disputed among cultural producers and consumers, yet the multiple aesthetic value-judgments are assumedly structurally shaped by the evaluators' habitus and field positions and (unconsciously) guided by their social interests. Agents use taste judgment to take position and support their claim to social worth. In these classification struggles parties endeavour to impose their worldview on others, yet privileged actors have more symbolic power at their disposal. Thus emerge objectified cultural hierarchies, which roughly reflect social hierarchies, and in which tastes differ in their exchange-value and operate as capital. Due to this homology between taste and class-position, cultural judgments socially classify the classifiers. While cultural hierarchies transform over time, their relative stability derives from the fact that those richest in symbolic power (who can transform hierarchies) are usually heavily invested in already-consecrated culture and have no interest in devaluing it. In this model critics and juries, themselves positioned in the field, are privileged actors at the frontier of the struggles over cultural evaluation, as they have power to consecrate.

Becker (1982) offered a less agonistic account, in which cultural value is a collective achievement, a social construction produced by 'art worlds'—heterogeneous networks consisting of cultural producers, consumers and mediators. While all these parties have some power over cultural evaluation, critics allegedly play a privileged role in stabilizing value: they distribute reputation by formulating and applying aesthetic evaluation criteria, transform the tastes of audiences, stabilize the meaning of artworks, and eventually shape hierarchies.

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) replaced Bourdieu's ontological economy of value with a grammar of value. They recognize the critical capacity of lay actors to make different value judgments and criticize one another by shifting between incompatible logics ('worlds of worth') from a cultural repertoire shared across class lines. Thus, worth consists of creativity and authenticity in the inspired world; of expertise in the industrial world; of recognition and celebrity in the world of fame; of putting general interest above selfish interests in the civic world; and of financial profit in the market world. Unlike Bourdieu's forms of capital these forms of worth are incommensurable, inconvertible and often mutually excluding. While giving up the pretension to objectively evaluate the ontological worth of a cultural good, Boltanski and Thévenot gained insights into the cultural vocabulary available to actors to defend (and tentatively stabilize) value judgments or to criticize them and replace them with alternative ones.

Karpik (2010) claimed that the standard economic supply-and-demand model is hardly relevant to most actual markets, since most commodities are non-standard, unique commodities that qualitatively differ from their competitors. In order to compare between unique commodities people must rely on 'judgment devices', socio-technical cognitive aides such as networks, appellations, cicerones and rankings, without which evaluation (and hence stabilization of hierarchies) cannot take place.

My data show that farterism critique is used to dismiss value judgments of all kinds: market prices, fame, critical appraise and field positions are accused of being arbitrary, dissociated from aesthetic worth; apparent creativity (inspirational value) or noble motives (civic value) are viewed as merely strategic pretensions; and aesthetic judgments by cultural consumers, producers and critics are all suspected of being...
distorted by the selfish interest to be classified through strategic classifying—critical sensitivities that may be considered a quasi-layer of critical sociology.

Ironically, when critical sociological sensitivities seep into lay common-sense, a new evaluation regime emerges which cannot be fully accounted for within the critical Bourdieusian framework. Farterism critique cannot be explained away as yet another case of working-class critique of pretension, since producers and consumers of 'high' tastes partake in the same critique and suspicions that threaten to devalue their own cultural capital, contrary to their symbolic interests. Farterism critique transforms evaluation dynamics, changing the rules of the game. By allegedly exposing the social sources of cultural evaluation, it arouses radical suspicion across class lines and puts on the defensive all indicators of value (symbolic and financial alike). Understanding it requires attending more seriously to the critical capacity of lay actors (the manifestations of which are often informed by their symbolic interests, but are irreducible to them) and to the historically specific cultural sensitivities and discourses used in lay critique. Below I explore how this emerging critique reshapes evaluation dynamics and discuss factors that could have encouraged the rise of this lay epistemology of suspicion, such as the growing economic significance of sign-value, the popularization of academic critical discourses, and the blurring of the high/popular distinction.

The sins of farterism

Reviewers referred to 'farterism' while accusing cultural objects and their consumers of farterism, while defending cultural objects or themselves from such allegations, or while praising objects for being free of farterism. 'Farterist' consumers were accused of consuming high-status cultural objects for social distinction, showing off their (alleged) refinement while sacrificing pleasure (use-value) for sign-value (Baudrillard 1998). 'Farterist' commodities were described as merely sign-commodities, whose value derives from their capacity to signify value (signification which is often a discursive social construction produced by merely talking) rather than from their inherent virtues.

Farterism is the sin of the privileged. Farterists were consistently characterized as Ashkenazim (Jews of European descent, Israel's ethnic hegemonic group), cultured, affluent, graduates of prestigious private schools, or residences of wealthy or bobo neighbourhoods in or around Tel-Aviv. By calling the tastes of the privileged 'farterist', actors could distinguish the good from the posh (also see Sayer 2005) while expressing class resentment. Thus, a review of Michael Radford's film 1984 stated that “today no-one would hold on for two hours in front of it, except for a few farterists from [a Tel-Aviv well-to-do neighbourhood]”. Tel-Aviv was described as the capital of sign-value: as one Haaretz food-columnist claimed, in Tel-Aviv even street-food is eaten in farterist designed spaces as a self-branding 'statement', conspicuous simplicity; hence reviewers were often surprised when they found anti-farterist restaurants in Tel-Aviv. Metrosexual (middle-class) masculinity was also considered farterist, while working-class traditional masculinity (and foods associated with it) were considered anti-farterist. Beverley Skeggs (2004, 2011) contrasted contemporary middle-class subjectivities (possessive selves continuously investing time to generate exchange-value through investment in culture) with working-class subjectivities, which for structural reasons are less directed at symbolic capital accumulation and more interested in use-value. When reviewers suspect the privileged of farterism, they seem to make similar assumptions (often explicitly referring to the symbolic profits associated with 'farterist' tastes)—however, as I show below, members of the cultural elites shared this suspicion.

High-status commodities (like art-films and expensive, trendy and highly-regarded restaurants) were similarly suspected of farterism. Non-American and art-films were suspected by default for their implicit claim to quality that reviewers often found unjustified, but were occasionally cleared of blame (Blue is the Warmest Colour was hailed as farterism-free despite being a 3-hour-long Cannes-winning film). However, farterism claims were addressed at various films and restaurants: even exemplars of 'low' genres (Hollywood action and superheroes films) were occasionally accused of farterism for taking themselves too seriously or being too philosophical.

Farterism is associated with certain surface aesthetic. This aesthetic, directed at signalling and maximizing exchange-value, may—as surface aesthetic often does (Alexander 2010)—sensuously evoke an experience of moral meaning within an anti-farterist ethical framework. Restaurants dubbed 'farterist' often had a particular aesthetic manifested in their space design, plating, and service: these were described as impressive, professional and beautiful but cold, uncomfortable and formal. Dishes were small, complex, unusual, and artistically plated. Restaurants praised as non-farterist were contrariwise described as warm,
informal, having homey atmosphere, and privileging essence (tasty food) over impression: their old-fashioned, modest design, plating and pricing mask their real, inconspicuous worth. Similarly, farterist films are ‘impressive but boring’, arousing ‘disappointment mixed with admiration’. Hence even shiny Hollywood productions or hollow action films that excessively use special effects were occasionally considered farterist. Yet most often farterist films were characterized as slow, boring and devoid of plot, and stylistically innovative. Occasionally they were also characterized by symbolism; cross-references; lack of humour, and politically correctness. Admirable but unenjoyable, they put form above content (the hallmark of modernist high art), claims for objective value above subjective value (which reviewers considered more real), and impression over pleasure. The ethic of farterism critique considered it a sin for cultural consumers to prefer impression and socially recognized value over subjective pleasure.

Farterism critique challenges cultural hierarchies by challenging prevailing modes of accumulation. Farterist restaurants were described as ‘overpriced’: despite small, mediocre, or pretentious and unpalatable dishes, they enjoy overestimation by the market. They can charge high prices because of their promotionalism (Wernick 1991): they produce value through investment not only in food quality, but also in design, PR, menus, and the simulacrum of artistic creativity. Similarly, farterist films are overrated and attributed high-value for mere mannerism. Farterism critique suspects all consumption to be conspicuous consumption, but laypersons can resist this inflation of value by identifying value-producing mechanisms and criticizing them. Those include:

**Uniqueness.** Both films and restaurants were accused of farterism for trying to be unique at all costs. While uniqueness may indicate creativity and inspiration, it was often suspected as an attempt to produce strategic impression of creativity and scarcity in order to maximize economic and symbolic profits. Thus, a reviewer described Anderson’s Moonrise Kingdom as ‘a silly farterist movie, trying to be “different cinema”’, it mainly succeed in being needless cinema’. Directors were often accused of farterism while privileging form over content, the hallmark of modernist high-art: unusual stylistic choices that draw viewers’ attention to form (black-and-white, hybrid genres, Birdman’s one-shot illusion, Irreversible’s hectic camera movements) were criticized as strategic production of difference. Similarly, ‘farterist’ critics and cinema-goers were mocked upon for being obsessed with self-differentiation, preferring ‘Japanese films dubbed into Swedish’.

Restaurants were similarly labelled as farterist for preferring rare ingredients (‘eggs? They don’t have any, only quail eggs’) and unusual combinations (figs, tuna, yoghurt and tahini; adding pistachios to traditional East-European Jewish fish to give it a ‘touch of fusion’), regardless of flavour and harmony. As one reviewer noted, ‘[t]here’s too much "innovation". I call it farterism, when food tries too much to become something, so much that it’s tasteless’.

Boltanski and Chiapello suggested that ‘the way capitalism has incorporated the demand for authenticity by commodifying it has prompted a redefinition of authenticity’: once capitalism has begun to fabricate uniqueness, inauthenticity is no longer defined as ‘mass production and standardization dissolving difference’, but rather as ‘reproduction of a difference for commercial ends’ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007:449). However, whereas standardization is self-evident, it is usually debatable whether uniqueness is authentic or rather instrumental and inauthentic. Hence, as they suggest, ‘the possibility of commodifying differences ushers in a new era of suspicion’ (ibid, p.446). While they claim that this notion of authenticity has already decayed, my data suggest otherwise: ‘farterism’ is the epithet given to uniqueness suspected as instrumental manipulation in fields were creativity and uniqueness can easily be exchanged for economic and symbolic profits.

**Seriousness** The farterist’s hallmark is taking culture and oneself too seriously. Farterist films deal with serious topics (history, mythology, high culture) that bestow upon them their unquestionable value. Farterist cinema-goers and films lack sense of humour (a highly-classed accusation, e.g. Friedman & Kuipers 2013; Warde 2007). Expecting every film to be ‘ingenious’, farterists cannot enjoy an entertaining film that ‘doesn’t take itself too seriously’. This seriousness is typically expressed in intellectual talk.

**Cheap talk.** Words are suspicious for their capacity to render both speakers and described objects valuable. Farterist critique is not aimed at the hedonistic consumption of gourmet food and wine in itself, but rather at the culinary discourse accompanying it, which is viewed as academic and boring, a mere instrument of distinction dissociated from actual sense-experience. This Platitudinous culinary discourse was often interpreted as representing the swift penetration of foreign gourmet culture and its use as a class-marker in a vulgar reaction to the asceticism of former generations. Farterists talk about food and wine to arrogantly boast their refinement and knowledge and ‘beat their opponents in the farterism competition’.
Menus were similarly accused of farterism for producing value by using pompous, mystified dish names (‘white cloud’) or using rare synonyms (calling the common Schnitzel ‘Milanesa’). Charging diners for words is viewed as fraudulent. Similarly, an article on wine criticism noticed that picturesque ‘farterist’ descriptions ‘turned more perverse the more bottle prices skyrocketed’. Another journalist accused a famous chef of granting potatoes an idiosyncratic ‘farterist’ name in order to differentiate the potatoes served at his high-end restaurant and described poetically in its menu from their identical ‘plebeian brothers’. Farterism is thus the production of value through verbal production of difference. Intellectual critical reviews, as well as catalogues and label texts of art exhibitions, were similarly accused of farterism for their capacity to inflate the monetary and symbolic exchange-value of films and artworks by merely talking about them, through what Bourdieu described as the magical power to name (Bourdieu 1991:105).

Language is not only the typical medium of farterism: the data include many cases, in which linguistic performances were considered themselves farterist. In these cases talking was interpreted as a claim for social value (through high register, rare words, hyper-standard accent or professional jargon—performances with high value in the linguistic market: Bourdieu 1991) rather than a transparent medium of communication. In particular, reviewers criticized the personal interest behind the language choices of professional critics.

**Design.** Some reviewers dubbed restaurants ‘farterist’ for investment in design and plating (‘admittedly the place is magnificently designed, but we came to eat, not to “absorb atmosphere”’). This critique condemns investment in dimensions which are considered inessential to the evaluated object as a promotionalist valorization strategy. However, other reviewers did consider design part of the product, as they constructed the product as an ‘experience’. In the contemporary ‘experience economy’ (Pine and Gilmore 1999) products and marketing are indeed hard to distinguish.

**Clientele.** Reviewers repeatedly criticized as farterists those who frequent trendy restaurants and spend large sums of money only to ‘see and be seen’, or ‘to feel part of the scene’, regardless of the food quality, e.g. ‘I'm past my infantile show-off stage and feel no need to show my face in Kyoto [a Japanese restaurant]’. Again, consumption for impression management—unlike hedonistic consumption—is considered ethically flawed. Farterist objects are valuable because high-status people consume them. While ‘farterist’ places yield value from their clientele, anti-farterist places are inclusionary, places where ‘it doesn't matter how you look, how old you are or what you wear’. Farterism critique is often directed against trendy practices and commodities, not only because hype inflates perceived value, but because those who join the hype may be motivated by their will to be trendy in a context where trendiness is a form of capital, that is, to gain symbolic profits.

**Fields and markets**

Reviewers employed farterism critique to encourage readers to trust their own judgment against those of markets and fields. User-reviews on Israel's leading restaurants repeatedly stated ‘the emperor has no clothes’. While referring to Messa, a well-established chef restaurant consistently ranked by experts among Israel's top restaurants, reviewers stated that ‘good food isn't measured by its price, even if it’s expensive it doesn't necessarily means it’s worthy'; and that ‘you shouldn't be afraid not to be considered cool if you didn't quite enjoy it’, thus empowering readers against the power of both market prices and reputation. This democratic ethic of taste, which demands individuals to trust their senses and proscribes subjecting oneself to external authority (Shapin 2012:83) gains further moral power once embracing the judgment of others (joining the hype) may yield one symbolic profits, and is thus suspected of being self-serving.

In the more institutionalized cinematic field, farterism critique challenged the judgments of critics and prize juries. Reviewers used anti-farterist rhetoric to discredit acclaimed films and claim value for genres (sci-fi, action, animation and comedy) and particular films that failed to achieve critical recognition. While urging their readers to give a chance to a lightweight film (such as Coen's *Intolerable Cruelty*) or one unpopular among critics they used the imperative ‘don't be a farterist’. Some reviewers explicitly attacked professional critics (describing them as 'depressed' and 'lacking sense of humour') and urged readers not to trust them, claiming (a-la-Bourdieu) that corrupted by their selfish symbolic interests in distinction, critics praise the rare rather than the good. Reviewer Daniel accused critics of trying to demonstrate their 'farterist cinematic erudition' rather than assess films 'objectively and sincerely'. Reviewer Yoel reported: 'My friend and I went to [Sokurov's Russian Ark] because it received great reviews. The film is very bad, we left in the
middle out of boredom (...) Critics are merely farterists who give high scores to weird movies just for being unusual, regardless of their quality).

However, this is not simply the story of working-class (or low-cultural-capital) reviewers who fight back against symbolic violence by employing a 'critique of pretension' (as in Skeggs 2005). Surprisingly, one of Haaretz's professional critics made an identical argument, accusing Sokurov's film of 'record levels of farterism, pretension and boredom' and of making trivial historical comments in a pompous tone. Similarly, an art scholar interviewed in Haaretz echoed Daniels’ argument, accusing art critics of boasting their erudition to belittle their readers. Members of the cultural elites employed farterism discourse in similar ways to user-reviewers (who themselves were not always low-cultural-capital): in Haaretz columns and interviews culture professionals claimed the emperor has no clothes and disqualified field-positions as arbitrary by employing a quasi-sociological analysis. When a television critic condemned the 'mafia-clique' that allegedly controls Israeli television industry and its 'farterist' aesthetic standards, he employed analytic tools similar to those of critical sociologists to neutralize the value-producing mechanisms (aesthetics) by exposing their hidden social function (maintaining closure and professional hierarchies). Farterism critique systematically employs sociological sensitivities to challenge stabilized value in classification struggles. This occasionally amounts to sacrilege, e.g. when a famous painter (asked about overestimated authors in an interview for Haaretz's literature section) dismissed Nobel laureate Agnon as 'farterist' without further explanation.

While reviewers and critics used farterism critique to reject prevailing evaluation standards, they did not simply reverse hierarchies. In all three sets, actors praised some objects for their true creativity, complexity and quality, which they considered innocent of farterism: novels, the language of which is rich but not farteristically flowery; ‘superb cooking that doesn’t proclaim itself one’, etc. Yet, for lack of simple criteria, distinctions between true distinction and farterism remained highly contested.

**Double threat**

Actors who contested field or market judgments knew that their judgments could classify themselves, hence they were constantly cautious of falling into any of two opposite stigmatic categories. Praising acclaimed art-films or chef restaurants (or criticizing popular films as shallow and simplistic) may classify evaluators as ‘farterists’, whose judgment has been corrupted: intellectualism and high-culture are constantly suspected as being mere attempts to socially constitute self-worth. Conversely, criticizing high-status objects as farterist may classify evaluators as lacking cultural competence to pass judgement. In the case of restaurant reviews, over-price claims may classify evaluators as misers or people lacking the financial means to frequent high-end restaurants, for whom expensive restaurant are over-priced regardless of their food.

Hence evaluators moved carefully. Those who praised highly-regarded films fended off possible farterism allegations by claiming to be generally suspicious of festival-films; or by demonstrating reflexivity ('this might sound slightly farterist, but...'). A famous artist excused his knowledgeability of wine by relating it to his 'drunkard uncle', insisting he was not a 'farterist' but rather a 'drinker', who simply knows 'which wine does me good'. The prevalence of the apologetic phrases 'not being a farterist' and 'I know it might sound farterist' demonstrates the stigmatic status of farterism. These phrases neutralize critique by demonstrating that the speakers are actually not farterist, as they share common values (anti-farterist sentiments) with their audience, and thus dismiss virtual farterism allegations by offering an alternative interpretation—a typical Goffmanian remedial ritual (Goffman 1971).

Conversely, those who accused objects of farterism stressed their cultural competence, claiming to have a refined taste and cultural knowledge which authorize them to reject the field’s judgments. This defensive was needed indeed: user-reviewers often referred to other user-reviewers, and those who made farterism accusations were in some cases accused of incompetence (e.g. ‘whoever calls Turquoise "a farterist place" probably hasn’t eaten in enough gourmet restaurants home and abroad’). They were even accused of criticizing farterism in order to come across as 'the world’s greatest expert'.

Here farterism critique is directed at itself: farterism accusations are themselves suspected to be strategic value claims. Indeed, the hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur 1970) produces endless recursivity: even rejecting farterism may be suspected as a strategy to generate self-value. In a fiction short story published in Haaretz's literature section, a girl the protagonist wants to impress is impressed to see him holding a quality newspaper. He then consider telling her he only bought it for the local newspaper that comes inside, in order to impress her by his honesty and by not being 'dragged into farterism'. In a world where consumption of high culture is suspected to be an accumulation strategy, refusing the opportunity to
capitalize on high culture may indeed generate the highest symbolic profits. As one Haaretz’s interviewee puts it, ‘it’s much more farterist to say you hate farterism’.

Doubts and defensives

As demonstrated above, the farterism discourse offers actors a language to criticize cultural hierarchies and guard against symbolic violence. While its power to replace prevailing aesthetic standards might be limited (evaluating its long-term cultural impact on hierarchies requires different data), it raises constant doubts: do gaps between personal judgment and recognized cultural hierarchies represent the corruption of the field, or individual incompetence? Author and jurist Zvi Triger wrote that ‘we’ve all eaten in farterist restaurants and visited farterist exhibitions, and struggled inside ourselves between knowing we witness farterism and the gnawing slight doubt: maybe we don’t understand’ (Triger 2007). Trigger suggests that this experience of doubt is universal, at least among his imagined audience of art exhibition visitors, which are obviously middle-class and rich in cultural capital. This space of doubt open for interpretation emerged in my data in reviewers’ statements such as ‘I don’t know, maybe people would consider the photography “challenging” or “artistic”, or whatever; I think it’s farterism, it was quite annoying, I still feel dizzy’. It is not the Bourdieusian self-doubt of those who have not yet fully appropriated the prevailing evaluation criteria to apply them naturally and flexibly—but rather self-doubts that derive from the structure of the evaluation regime, from the fact that despite some aesthetic rules of thumb, there exist no simple rules to distinguish farterism from true cultural value. This uncertainty also reflected on the creators: as one chef suggested, ‘things that used to be perceived as art or sincere statements can suddenly be perceived as farterism’, for which, he claimed, creators may ‘pay dearly’.

The Haaretz dataset indicates that the main addressees of farterism critique—high-culture producers, mediators and consumers—rarely reject the farterism category altogether. Admittedly, over the years a few columns criticized farterism critique as a barbaric attack on culture, accusing it of shallowness; narcissism; oversimplification; shamelessness; infantilism; anti-intellectualism; lack of reflexivity, moral constraints and accountability; and even fascism. Trying to stigmatize their stigmatizers these columnists endeavoured to restore trust in cultural hierarchies. Some insisted that poetic language is usually not farterist vain pretence, but rather accurately describes subjective experiences: talking about a wine’s ‘veil of vanilla’ is not different than comparing your lover’s eyes with fire (a comparison made by a wine and alcohol writer). Some even threw the same accusations at their accusers, who allegedly allow social hierarchies to bias their cultural judgment by sweepingly rejecting all things luxurious or ‘smelling of quality or culture’ (thus accusing them of what Sayer called ‘inverted snobbery’: Sayer 2002:5.3).

However, more often they took the farterism category for granted. Michele Ollivier (Ollivier et al 2009:459) suggested that once struggles over evaluative criteria are decided, classification struggles centre on which practices and groups best embody consensual criteria. While farterism is widely recognized as an evaluation criterion, its flexibility and elusiveness allowed conflicting implementations of the same rhetoric. Films and restaurants dubbed farterist by some reviewers were praised by other reviewers for not being farterist. A restaurateur accused of farterism for charging high prices for simple dishes used the same facts to boast his rejection of farterism, his refusal to cook unusual and sophisticated gimmicks preferred by customers such as ‘halva lamb’. However, by recognizing farterism, high-status cultural producers (and the consumers of their products) had to be on the defensive.

This defensiveness of cultural elites must be accounted for while addressing the power and limitation of Bourdieusian analysis of farterism. Indeed, farterism rhetoric often serves marginally positioned actors: denied recognition, second-class artists, scholars and authors use it to delegitimize centrally-positioned actors and challenge value-allocation standards in the field. In these cases farterism critique easily fits in within Bourdieusian field analysis. Similarly, consumers’ use of farterism critique against tastes of more privileged groups lends itself to Bourdieusian analysis in terms of interests and habitus. From a Bourdieusian perspective, in these cases farterism discourse represents the weakening of symbolic violence as lay actors are increasingly conscious of the ‘sociological truth’ of taste (cf. Hennion 2007:102). This classed dimension is crucial for understanding the phenomenon.

Yet in many cases the immediate suspects of farterism critique recognized anti-farterism as a valid evaluative criterion and used it to criticize cultural objects and practices and legitimate their own tastes. Curiously enough, even consecrated artists employed farterism critique against the very art discourse used to consecrate them and justify their canonical status. This finding is far from trivial. In Bourdieu’s sociology,
rhetoric plays a minor role: the dominant can sometimes impose their worldview on the dominated, but this symbolic violence is mere realization of pre-existing power asymmetries, unrelated to the content of their arguments. Influence in the opposite direction is unaccounted for. Bourdieu, who understood critique as shaped by habitus and structural interests, easily explained the working-class rejection of all investment in appearance as 'pretentious' sham (Bourdieu 1984:199, see also Skeggs 2005), yet his framework is less apt to explain why suspicions that might devalue cultural capital cross class boundaries and spread among those rich in cultural capital. Critique that challenges the very illusio of the field might also challenge fundamental assumptions of critical sociology.

Discussion

We should then go beyond Bourdieu to understand farterism as not merely another evaluation criterion employed in classification struggles, but one that transforms the rules of the game. In this emerging evaluation regime cultural evaluation takes place under an epistemology of suspicion. All actions and judgments are suspected as claims to self-value, a suspicion that spreads across class boundaries.

Farterism critique is related to anti-snobbery. Alan Warde found that in the UK 'snobbery is universally abhorred' and 'fear of being thought a snob' restricted critical remarks on the taste of others (Warde 2007:13), just as fear of being considered farterist does. However, farterism critique goes further than anti-snobbery, suspecting that the capacity to use highly-regarded cultural objects for distinction is their sole source of worth, and doubting their claims to inherent value. Omnivorousness, a consumption pattern often considered the successor of snobbery, represents a liberal aversion of using rigid genre hierarchies as proxies of value (Peterson & Kern 1996). Farterism critique extends suspicion from genres to all recognized proxies of value, including prices, expert opinion, reputation and aesthetic/stylistic markers of quality. Ironically, this suspicion is also addressed at liberalism itself: cultural openness was accused of farterism, suspected of being itself an instrumental accumulation strategy. Thus, a political commentator called liberal judges 'farterists' for their lenient sentencing (insinuating that their judgment was biased by their interest to come across as progressive); while a literary critic suggested that Tel-Aviv's entertainment industry considers as 'farterism' attempts to stress the contrast between its escapism and the bleeding Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Farterism critique represents a lay hermeneutic of suspicion that challenges value stabilized by different devices (critics, prices and prizes), institutional mechanism (fields/art-worlds and markets) and rhetorical mechanisms (different 'worlds')—not only external measures like fame and market prices, but also creativity, originality or openness. Constantly 'revealing' the 'corrupted' particular interests behind aesthetic judgments and the gap between use-value and sign- and exchange-value, it spreads constant doubt of all sorts of recognized value.

In the terms of On Justification (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006), farterism critique may be viewed as a rather eclectic set, as it passes critique from different worlds (the inspired, industrial, and civic worlds) over claims to worth in different worlds (the fame, market, inspired and even the civic worlds); however, all these moves followed a shared cultural logic that was recognized as such by the social actors. Rather than criticizing one hierarchization principle in order to replace it with another, farterism critique suspects all kinds of stabilized hierarchies of corruption.

This existential suspicion transforms the relations between judgments of individuals and those produced by fields and markets: individuals are no longer required to bow to expert opinion but rather to doubt it. Those who accept without doubt the supremacy of high-status tastes may be accused of 'farterist' corruption, as the recognized value of legitimate tastes rubs off on those who recognize it. Farterism critique is thus quite distinct from practical relativism, from the 'reluctance to judge the tastes of others' (Warde 2007:13): rather than claiming that all judgments are equally valid, it allows actors to criticize aesthetic judgments of others and pass severe judgment on those suspected of corruption, of disobeying the authenticity imperative to follow their internal judgment. The authenticity imperative is not necessarily any less restrictive or more liberating than other social norms (for further discussion: Author).

At first glance, farterism critique seems to cast cultural consumers in the role of critical sociologists who reveal hidden interests and demystify the production of value. However, this similarity is limited: for Bourdieu-inspired critical sociology all aesthetic judgments are arbitrary and inherently social. By contrast, reviewers often assumed that some films and restaurants are really good.

This 'real value' (or use-value) was often conceptualized as the capacity to produce pleasure universally, even among the uninitiated—an a democratic rhetoric that can be traced back to Jean-Jacques
Rousseau (Meyer 2000). The capacity of laypersons to distinguish between internal goods (value inherent to cultural objects and practices) and external goods (such as social status), between use-value and exchange-value, enables them to criticize discrepancies between these levels as undeserved distinction—a critical potential studied by Andrew Sayer (2005). However, this potential has not always been equally realized. Farterism critique relies on an ethic of authenticity but represents a historically unique articulation of this tradition.

What is new is not the critique of pretension and snobbism for themselves, but rather (1) the suspicion that recognized value may indicate the lack of real value (as consumers may profit from praising already highly-regarded objects); (2) the emergence of a public language that allows actors to easily dismiss recognized value claims by raising this lay-sociological suspicion; and (3) the spread of this suspicion among producers and consumers of high culture and high-end luxury products. How can we explain the emergence of farterism critique as a historically-specific discourse and its wide currency across class boundaries? Possible explanations, which are not mutually exclusionary, include:

1. Structural economic changes in markets: we live at the zenith of promotionalism, when products and selves turn into self-advertisements designed to promote their own sales (Wernick 1991); and when growing shares of market-value are produced symbolically (by branding and marketing experts). This sign-value, ‘the industrial production of social differences’ was defined by Baudrillard (1998) as a simulacrum of simulacrum of use-value. Against this backdrop there emerged the most recent incarnation of the authenticity ethic, the ethic of autotelicity and spontaneity and its critique of instrumentality (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005), on which farterism critique relies.

2. Popularization of academic critical discourses, which have denaturalized and relativized cultural hierarchies, challenging their claim to autonomy from social power-relations. This project is the collective achievement of an eclectic set of critical attitudes (neo-Marxist, post-modern, post-colonial, Bourdieusian, STS, feminist and others), despite their significant ontological, epistemological and political differences. These ideas have informed political struggles over cultural recognition against hegemony and seeped into everyday common-sense. Cultural consumers and producers have been disenchanted and sociological critique has gained everyday currency. Ironically, this suspicion is also in line with the rise of neo-liberal subjectivity, which perceives all human actions in terms of maximization of self-interest. However, while laypersons are better equipped to criticize the arbitrariness of idiosyncratic elite tastes and their role in social closure, symbolic appropriation of high-status culture (which is itself an emphatically modern phenomenon: Lizardo 2008) still offers considerable symbolic gains, disenchantment notwithstanding. While ordinary people have a language to politically critique cultural hierarchies as arbitrary, and while it is no longer legitimate to use cultural differences to legitimate social hierarchies (Warde 2007), culture still plays a significant role in signifying identities and social worth.

3. Structural changes in cultural fields: blurring of the high/popular and commercial/artistic distinctions and increasing commodification and marketization that corrode cultural legitimacy (Warde 2007); informalization processes (Wouters 2007); and the growing uncertainty and unpredictability of cultural fields and markets, which lack coherent evaluation criteria (e.g. Greenfeld 1988, Velthuis 2003).

None of these processes is endemic to Israel, and neither are anti-farterist sentiments. Friedman & Kuipers (2013) documented the suspicion of low-cultural-capital informants that highbrow comedy audiences don't prefer the funniest comedians but those who allow them to differentiate themselves and indulge in self-congratulatory smugness—a sin the latter somewhat ashamedly confessed. Skeggs (2005) discussed the 'critique of pretension' among the British working-class as a defensive strategy against the symbolic violence of middle-class judgment. Sayer (2005:183) suggested that in working-class communities 'the pursuit and display of cosmopolitanism is read as an attempt to assert cultural and moral superiority'. These sentiments are not merely a class strategy; they spread across class lines. David Halle (1994) documented the suspicion of many middle- and upper-class interviewees about abstract art. They considered it a hoax made by charlatans, not only for lack of realism or clear 'message', but also for failing to evoke immediate emotional effect, lacking use-value as emotional commodities. Criticizing these artworks' social and financial value ('million-dollar price tags') as a 'put-on', they come very close to the critiques I documented in Israel. Thomas Thurnell-Read (2015) documented the stigmatization of UK real
ale enthusiasts for their excessive seriousness. While Thurnell-Read believes they are stigmatized for diverting from the omnivorous ideal of extensive, non-specialized consumption, in his data ale enthusiasts are mainly ridiculed for their pretence, pompous jargon and attempts to impress even while discussing an everyday drink. Israelis looking at the ‘Ale Twats’ VIZ comics would easily identify them as ‘farterists’.

Hence I refuse to isolate farterism critique of its global historical context and to interpret it as yet another manifestation of an old Zionist ethos of anti-intellectualism, down-to-earth attitude and informality (Almog 2000; Kateriel 1986; Yair 2011). Local tradition may however explain why these multiple global late-modern sentiments and suspicions crystallized in Hebrew into a single concept and turned into a public powerful critical discourse.

I also resist the temptation to interpret the emergence of farterism discourse as merely an effect of the declining autonomy of fields versus markets under neoliberalism (cf. Hanrahan 2012 on online reviews). Farterism critique was not directed only at cultural experts and cultural capital but also at luxury items. It does not subject cultural worth to market worth: it challenges both for their alleged social source, revealing that both kinds of worth cannot be traced back to the evaluated objects.

Conclusion

Bourdieu endeavoured to disenchant aesthetic judgment, uncovering the social interests behind it. More recently, Sayer (2005) urged us to reintroduce use-value and the Macintyrean distinction between internal and external goods. My data demonstrate that laypersons follow both strategies in everyday struggles over aesthetic evaluation. Knowing that culture is a capital, laypersons often demonstrate little trust in the autonomy of aesthetic judgment from the social and in the correlation between exchange- and use-value.

Farterism critique allows variously positioned individuals to challenge recognized cultural value by suspecting any consumption of being conspicuous consumption. All artistic choices and aesthetic judgments by cultural producers, mediators and consumers may be suspected as instruments of differentiation, motivated by social interests. Both this mistrust and the ethical rejection of such conspicuous consumption are historically specific, shaped by economic and cultural development traced above. Contemporary laypersons know the Bourdieusian truth that classifications classify the classifiers, hence those who consume or praise highly-regarded cultural objects (or those whose surface aesthetic easily classifies as valuable) are suspected of having renounced their sense experience, preferring films and restaurants that would classify them favourably over the most pleasing ones. Farterism critique is thus an ethical judgment that disqualifies the aesthetic judgments of others. It allows laypersons to resist judgments stabilized by different institutional mechanisms and discourses, markets and critics. Its ethical hedonistic imperative to privilege use-value over exchange-value, subjective experience over claims to objective worth—the ethic of authentic autotelicity that denounces all ‘second-level intention’, ‘strategic or ”manipulative” design’ (Boltanski & Chiapello 2007: 449), is heard across class boundaries.

On the aesthetic level, mannerisms that may bestow value on objects too easily—pretentious mystifying talk, overly impressive design, attempts to stand out as unique and innovative, or conforming to the aesthetic standards of highbrow genres and high-end market-niches (including aesthetic formalism and asceticism)—are most suspected. Cultural objects that seem less promotionalist—art-films with no static frames, chef restaurants with menus free from flowery descriptions—may enjoy more trust. As easy profit, farterism critique seems like a generalized version of Bourdieu’s account of petite-bourgeois pretension (Bourdieu 1984). Today the symbolic profits offered by tastes are no longer roughly proportional to the work invested in their symbolic appropriation, and as this labour theory of symbolic value loses ground, it is not only petite-Bourgeois who are suspected of searching for dubious easy profit, that is, tastes that would yield profits disproportional to the investment.

Farterism critique endows individuals with cultural authority—although not without risk of self-devaluation—to dismiss judgments of markets (overpricing) and fields (overestimation), expert opinion, crowd wisdom and prevailing aesthetic standards, by sociologizing the tastes of others. While sometimes used strategically by low-cultural-capital subjects to resist symbolic violence or by marginally located actors in the field to challenge it hierarchies, this distrust is contagious. Shared by producers and consumers of legitimate culture despite their interest, it compels them to justify themselves against virtual allegations of corruption.

This discourse opens a space for critique: while not changing hierarchies in itself, it weakens the capacity of the dominant to have their practices recognized as having internal worth. A space for critique
does not imply autonomy of culture from social structure; on the contrary, their interdependencies are unmasked. Thus, tastes and practices certified and legitimated by privileged actors and groups are classified as valuable by this social association—and are simultaneously suspected of having achieved their status corruptly, as an arbitrary effect of power, regardless of their inherent worth. This is how sociological insights operate in the world, shape cultural evaluation dynamics, and recast classification struggles in new forms under the conditions of uncertainty that characterize late-modern cultural fields.

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References

Appendix 1

Ngram frequency of *faltsanut* and its declensions, 1988-2008

Appendix 2

References to *faltsanut* and its declensions in Haaretz's archive, 1994-2006

\[1\] In 2005 the word *faltsanut* and its declinations appeared in Google Ngram database 7.4 times more frequently than in 1995, and 48 times more frequently than in 1991.

\[ii\] Rest has been the most popular Israeli restaurant review websites. I analysed all 225 reviews (written
between 2002-2015) that referred to farterism for a sample of 42 restaurants from different genres. I first read all available reviews on restaurants ranked among the top-10 Israeli restaurants in either a survey among chefs or an algorithmic aggregation of professional and semi-professional reviews. Among the 11 top restaurants that were reviewed in Rest, 7 were described as farterist at least once and included in the sample. I then sampled another 35 restaurants, for which at least one review referred to farterism. The final sample was diverse in terms of genre, geographic location and price level, with over-representation of highly-regarded and successful restaurants.

iii I used Google search to find all reviews published in Israeli film user-review websites (Seret, Sratim, Opinion) that included the word farterism.

iv I analyzed systematically all 149 relevant articles in Haaretz's archive published between 1.7.1994-31.12.2006, the period in which the term emerged. I also read a similar number of articles published since 2006, where similar patterns repeated.

v Cinema is a highly institutionalized field, where various international prizes institutionalize and objectify status hierarchies. Box office data is also generally available. Thus lay evaluation can be easily compared to market success, professional criticism, and prizes. The culinary field is much less institutionalized, especially in Israel, where no Michelin or Gault-Millau guides exist. However, with the increasing interest of the media in culinary since the 1990s, prominent chefs turned into celebrity public figure, familiar even to people who have never dined in chef restaurants.

vi TGI surveys indicate a significant over-representation of university-educated, high-income and liberals among Haaretz readers. Tastes associated with the affluent and educated are prone to be accused of farterism. Liberalism is also accused of farterism for similar reasons.

vii Formality is considered farterist, since it is respectable, but not fun. In their study of eating out in the UK, Warde and Martens (2000) identified a clear general informalization trend, which however have not swept away class differences in attitude to formality.

viii Even critics who agreed with professional hierarchies sometimes praised those who ignored it. Thus, a food critic praised a restaurant for its 'aversion to farterism' for including in its menu a particular Chardonnay that 'all Israeli winemakers love to hate': while the critic agreed that it was marketed too early, the restaurateur preferred the diners' interest (good value-for-money) over his symbolic interest (demonstrating his professional standards), thus proved not be a farterist.

ix In the 1990s the Israeli literary field was restructured by the 'thin language' rebellion, a young generation of authors who wrote literature in everyday language. In the data, book critics repeatedly praised books for language which is 'simultaneously rich and thin, complex but not farterist', i.e. for quality which cannot be easily classified as 'high' and hence which is not suspected of strategic promotionalism.

x Ironically, contemporary language tasting vocabulary and metaphors represent a historical reaction against the vague, poetic and mystifying language of the 18th-19th centuries. Shapin (2012) suggests that this language, which claims for objective analytic precision, has emerged in order to stabilize trust and hierarchies in new markets with no local wine traditions and within a democratic cosmology.

xi Hence children were described as an 'effective farterism filter', and 'farterist' restaurants were repeatedly described as unsuitable for children. In Rousseau's tradition, children have a 'natural' taste, not yet corrupted by artificialities and distinction motives (Meyer 2000). The Emperor's New Clothes' tale, which was repeatedly mentioned by user-reviewers, demonstrates the same assumptions.